

Controlling Hurricanes By Science And Supplication

Virgin Islanders set aside yesterday as Supplication Day, to pray for deliverance from hurricanes. At the end of the season in late October they celebrate Deliverance Day to give thanks for being spared — as they have been for almost 40 years.

Until recently, this method of warding off destruction was as good as any other. Now scientists in the United States, Russia and other countries are making limited progress in scientific weather modification. "Our theories aren't perfect, and we still have a lot to learn, but weather control is further advanced than the public generally realizes," Robert M. White, director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, observed recently.

Scientists at the NOAA's experimental meteorological laboratory in Miami have had partial success this spring with a cloud-seeding program aimed at alleviating the Florida drought. In the coming weeks scientists will attempt to weaken the force of potential hurricanes with a seeding method similar to the one used to make rain. Clouds are bombarded with vast quantities of silver iodide, which causes chemical changes that release heat and reduce the hurricane's wind velocity. Dr. Robert Simpson, director of

the National Hurricane Center in Miami, predicted last year that within five years a hurricane approaching the coast with 100-knot winds will have its winds reduced to 70 knots or less and the height of the water reduced by 50 per cent. The first suggestion that hurricanes could be controlled came in August 1969 when Hurricane Debbie abated after seeding.

Besides rain-making and hurricane control, researchers are also working on methods to suppress cloud-to-ground lightning, reduce hail, and disperse fog and snow storms. Science Magazine predicts that the unsolved technological problems of weather tampering will be resolved long before the legal and political ones it poses. The "use of weather modification techniques on a large scale raises

difficult questions about legal responsibilities, conflicting social desires, and appropriate governmental regulatory activities." Last year, for example, Florida tomato growers threatened to seek a court injunction against cloud-seeding until it was postponed. Moreover, the potential for international complications is so great it has so far deterred any wide-ranging weather experiments.

The Virgin Islanders will do well not to cancel their supplication sessions quite yet.

• The Morning Record - Jul'71. Controlling Hurricanes by Science and Supplication

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